Worldwide IWW membership on the increase

■ **Wobblies:** Out of 800 members in eight countries, the IWW has 20 in the Olympia area.

By Sandra Medearis
The Olympian

Worldwide membership in the International Workers of the World has doubled in the past two years, the union's leaders say.

There are more than 800 in eight countries, said Fred Chase, general secretary-treasurer.

The Wobblies haven't been much of a force since World War I, when the government and the union clashed over the union's insistence on the right to strike wartime industries. But now, workers in the United States are feeling the pinch of stagnant wages, "and that's good for us," Chase said.

"Workers are seeing an increasing gap between wages and the income of the CEOs," Chase said, speaking from Ypsilanti, Mich. "It's time for the workers to get their little bit more again. The economy is doing well, but wages have not kept up."

The Olympia Area IWW has 20 dues-paying members. Any worker can join, regardless of affiliation with other unions. The IWW stands for democracy, one union for all workers and eradication of capitalism and bureaucracy, union pamphleteers say.

The dues are small, intentionally, said Jess Grant, member of Olympia Area IWW.

Calling card
A Wobblie business card gets right to the point on its position toward management.

Steve Bloom
The Olympian

"We use solidarity, not money, in our fight," Grant said. "We can't out-money the big money anyway, so we keep our dues incredibly low. For someone unemployed, it is $3 a month and goes up from there to $15 on a sliding scale."

The group's literature renounces violence but encourages sabotage, which the IWW defines as "the conscious withdrawal of efficiency."

With its goal to eliminate capitalism, the union is not communist in philosophy and not political, Chase said.

"We have a couple of communists in the organization, but we also have Christian ministers," Chase said. "We don't want people arguing about political parties. We don't see parties as the solution to the working class struggle."

The IWW welcomes members of other unions and claims to have a number of two-carders, workers who belong to a trade union and the IWW. Still, the IWW philosophy goes against trade unions as a solution to workers getting a fair share of business profit. Wobblies believe that leaders of trade unions "hold hands" with employers, Chase said.

Conventional trade and industrial unions hold more choices for employees, said Owen Linch, secretary-treasurer for Teamsters & Chauffeurs Local 378.

"The structural differences of diverse unions governed by their own constitutions and bylaws offers people more options in the unions they choose to support," Linch said. "The IWW philosophy is different than mainstream in offering people fewer choices. If everyone is part of one big union, then where do you go if you don't agree?"

Holding hands with the bosses?

"Yeah, we were just holding hands with UPS," Linch laughed.